How could I possibly lend a deaf ear to such expert advice? Even though I might not be equipped to contribute more than an insignificant pebble to the linguistic pyramid, I yet felt stimulated by his words, and to a certain extent committed. Later, while I cudgeled my brain in an effort to untangle and isolate some rule from that mass of words which I had been able to collect, I would every now and then be successful and the resultant feeling of delight in accomplishment would be augmented by the anticipation of the further delight which would be mine when I returned to Buenos Aires and presented my findings to Gutiérrez and talked at length with him.

He was a man of great natural talent which had been magnified by deep erudition. Love of the arts and sciences was uppermost in his life. His tolerance was proportional to his vast knowledge and his free way of thinking. He was affable in manner, which was fitting to one who owed everything to his own efforts and who had experienced all of life's vicisitudes. At seventy and in his lofty literary and administrative position he knew how to inspire, even if with just a word, the most modest student, and to listen to and discuss with the most cordial deference the problems of the least of those who visited him, which is not such a common thing among men of his age and knowledge.

But the pleasure of speaking to him again was to be denied me. On my return the news which caught my attention in the first newspaper which I bought after landing was that of his death, which had occurred on the eve of my arrival!

May your memory, oh Gutiérrez, remain ever as alive and lasting in the hearts of your countrymen as it is in the heart of the author of these lines, who will preserve it in all its freshness! Be pleased to accept as dedicated to you, and protect with your name, the few paltry lines which I may write in the following pages on the subject of the Indian languages -- for it is to you that I owe them, and without you as patron I would not have dared to publish them!

II

Beginnings of the work. Particulars of a personal nature.

At the beginning of my labors I had but little hope of crowning my efforts with any success. We had on board with us an Indian

115
who claimed to be a Mataco, [233] and whom I immediately 124 ●
pressed into service by asking him the names of the different garments we were wearing and the objects which surrounded us. But the man would soon tire after I had asked him just a few words. It was evident that intellectual exertions, be they ever so light, were not for him. Whenever I would ask him the same word twice he would give me to understand that he had already told me and, picking up my notebook, would turn the few written pages it contained and find the right one and point out the general area in which the word alluded to was to be found. And yet I could have sworn that he was looking in some other direction while I was writing! When it is mentioned amongst us that someone is "acting the part of an Indian" -- in the sense that he is pretending to be unaware of what is going on -- a very great truth is affirmed.

With all this I was able to advance little or nothing in my 124
work.

But when a few days later we were harangued by the Toba chief, who seemed to be barking rather than talking, then I became absolutely convinced that I must keep to my own field of knowledge and not wander innocently into others, so useless did it seem to me even to attempt to make any sense out of those barks.

Man, however, proposes and circumstance disposes. A few days later we ran aground, and as we were unable to continue on our way I had ample spare time at my disposal to make use of as I saw fit. The Indians milled about on the land beside the ship. Many chiefs came to see us and we could not understand a word of what they said to us...here then was my opportunity, and I made ready to take full advantage of it.

The Indian is distrustful by nature and does not want out- 115
siders to learn his language; but among them was one Faustino, 124
a Christian [Text unclear as to whether this man was a "Christian Indian" who had given up his religion and returned to his own people, or a "Christian white" who had taken up with the Indians -- Translator.] who had gone over to them, and I, by stealth and without the Indians' knowing it, began to question him. However, I did not find this at all satisfactory, finding so much apparent

confusion in the words when they were strung into sentences and attributing the difficulty to Faustino's little understanding of the matter in hand. At last we were able to establish more friendly relations with the Indians by dint of our frank and open treatment; my continual and almost reverential repetition of their words as though they were precious things whenever an opportunity offered and, finally by the judicious distribution of a few gifts all of which, in combination, made them lose their wariness, especially in the case of the younger ones who then outdid themselves in telling me, of their own volition, the name of every object I cared to ask about. 116 124

But it was really strange: a word, when repeated, would change and be different for no apparent reason. At times its vowel sounds would seem separate, at others dipthonged, to the extent that if one of the two component sounds were stressed more than the other, neither one would agree. Often the change was in the syllable itself, so to speak, while on occasion there would be either a gain or a loss of a syllable. [Original version garbled--Translator] 124 [115]

One morning we made a test with Natalio Roldán. We spent a quarter of an hour establishing between us which was the true [234] sound which was to be reproduced with Spanish signs, and whether it was this sound or some other which had come through in a given word. This vagueness and lack of certainty confirmed Roldán in his opinion that the Mataco language was an enigma which could not be transcribed, was devoid of rules, and could not be learned, as the Missionary Fathers (who were established in Christian territory near the frontier) themselves had affirmed.

My ear, however, becoming accustomed to these new sounds, brought me slowly to the realization that the Mataco tongue was not after all that wild, untamable mustang which people would have one believe. This I realized while only as yet being able to isolate the sounds, for I could not at that time comprehend the reasons behind certain syllabic changes.

I decided to take a new tack and avoid all pretentious arguments on the subject, channelling my efforts into accumulating sentences, examining and comparing them later in order to be

able to extract a few rules from them after having written them down as it seemed to me that they sounded. 124

One day the son of a chief stopped by and I began to ask him the names of all the parts of his body. Naked as he was there was no possibility of confusing these parts of the body with the clothing associated with them. 124 193

Hardly had he finished when I perceived that each one of those fifteen or twenty words began, without exception, with nu or no, the u and the o substituting each other frequently, the difference in sound being hardly perceptible.

"Well I'll be...!" I said to myself. This nu is either an article or a relating particle, for it is not conceivable that so many words have the same root. It didn't seem likely to me that it was an article, but nevertheless I remembered that when I was a boy and I was asked by someone to name the parts of my face I used to answer using the article, and saying -- for example: "the mouth, the eye," etc. Why could these Indians not be just as childish as I?

I very soon had my doubts resolved. I asked him the same questions with reference to my own body, and he repeated the words he had given me, but changing the nu to a, and sometimes a few of the other letters which followed after the nu. It was as though a bolt of lightning had suddenly illumined my understanding -- but doubt returning, and being very desirous to get to the bottom of this problem, I took advantage of the occasion of my having caught a chimango [kite-like bird--Translator] and asked the same questions about the various parts of its body. In the answers I was given, many of the words began with lu or lo, but remained otherwise pretty much the same as those pertaining to man, minus that famous nu or a.

The following conclusion, almost concrete and tangible in its clarity, flashed before me: So the Matacos prefix a variable particle to their radical words, and this particle probably expresses a relationship. But what relationship?...I searched again through my notes, especially among the phrases and sentences and found that on every occasion when reference was made to the person who was talking the term began [235] with nu; if reference was to the person spoken to, with a, and if to a third person, then with lu or lo. 193

3: Metraux E-5 (1933) 1939 SI7 Mataco SI7

XIII. The Diseases

753 The diseases are demons which have the appearence of
776 men but are invisible. They wear feathers like medicine-
755 men. Smallpox for instance is especially ugly. His head is swollen and full of small holes. He lives not for from Salta, in a cave on a big mountain. The demons of disease live under the ground or within the *yuchanes*. They leave their shelter to enter men and make them sick. In order to get them out of the bodies of sick people one must ask them what they want, for the demons always want something. One has to say, »What do you want?» The demon answers, »Food, dresses, a gun.» All these things are to be given him. But they are equally satisfied with only the sight of these things and men may very well eat the food or make use of the things whose essence the demons have received. It would be very dangerous to eat of a dish before the demon has helped himself. Men dance in order to scare a demon or chase him away. The demon is obliged to participate in the dancing and gets tired. When those who take part in a treatment have danced for a while, the magician speaks to the disease. The disease asks whether they are angry with him. The medicine-man answers, »No, we are dancing as usual.» The disease then says, »Then let us not dance any longer, for I am to dance to-morrow too.»

753 Each thing has its *husék* (spirit) or image and it is this
774 image which the disease requires after he has stolen or entered the soul of the man and it is this soul which the medicine-man has gone to get. During the first part of all medical ceremonies, the medicine-man's spirit goes to the disease and asks him which things he wants in return for the sick man's soul.

● [124] One of the reasons why the Matako always require payment to let themselves be photographed is that by photographing them one takes their image (spirit) and thus may hurt them. The money they get for the photograph may eventually